DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 289 060 CE 049 287

AUTHOR Silverman, Eda; Hanna, Joyce
TITLE Test Anxiety Reduction. Curriculum Guide.
INSTITUTION CORA-Neumann Program, Philadelphia, PA.
SPONS AGENCY Pennsylvania State Dept. of Education, Harrisburg. Div. of Advisory Services.
PUB DATE May 87
CONTRACT 98-7018
NOTE 41p.; For related documents, see CE 049 285-286.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Basic Education; Behavioral Objectives; *Behavior Modification; *Change Strategies; Coping; High School Equivalency Programs; Learning Activities; Lesson Plans; Relaxation Training; *Stress Management; *Test Anxiety; *Test Wiseness
IDENTIFIERS 310 Project; *General Educational Development Tests

ABSTRACT

This curriculum guide is intended to assist teachers in helping their adult and teenage students learn to cope with their test anxiety. The introduction examines some of the causes of test anxiety and its negative ramifications from the standpoint of class placement, class grades, employment opportunities, and job advancement. General guidelines for presenting the curriculum (which is designed to be incorporated into four 2-hour classes) to students are listed. Procedural outlines are provided for each of the four classes. The objectives and goals, instructional procedures, and validation methods to be used in each class are cross-referenced. The following are among the topics covered during the four classes: physical and emotional behaviors associated with test anxiety, test anxiety as a conditioned fear, additional stressors experienced by minorities and women, general sources of test anxiety, childhood messages that lead to test anxiety, personal character traits that influence self-image, the connection between self-image and behavior, the phenomenon of catastrophicizing, strategies for reversing negative messages, strategies for taking reading and math tests, the benefits of exercise to reducing test anxiety, physical relaxation, stress reduction, methods of handling success, and ways of coping with anxiety. (MN)

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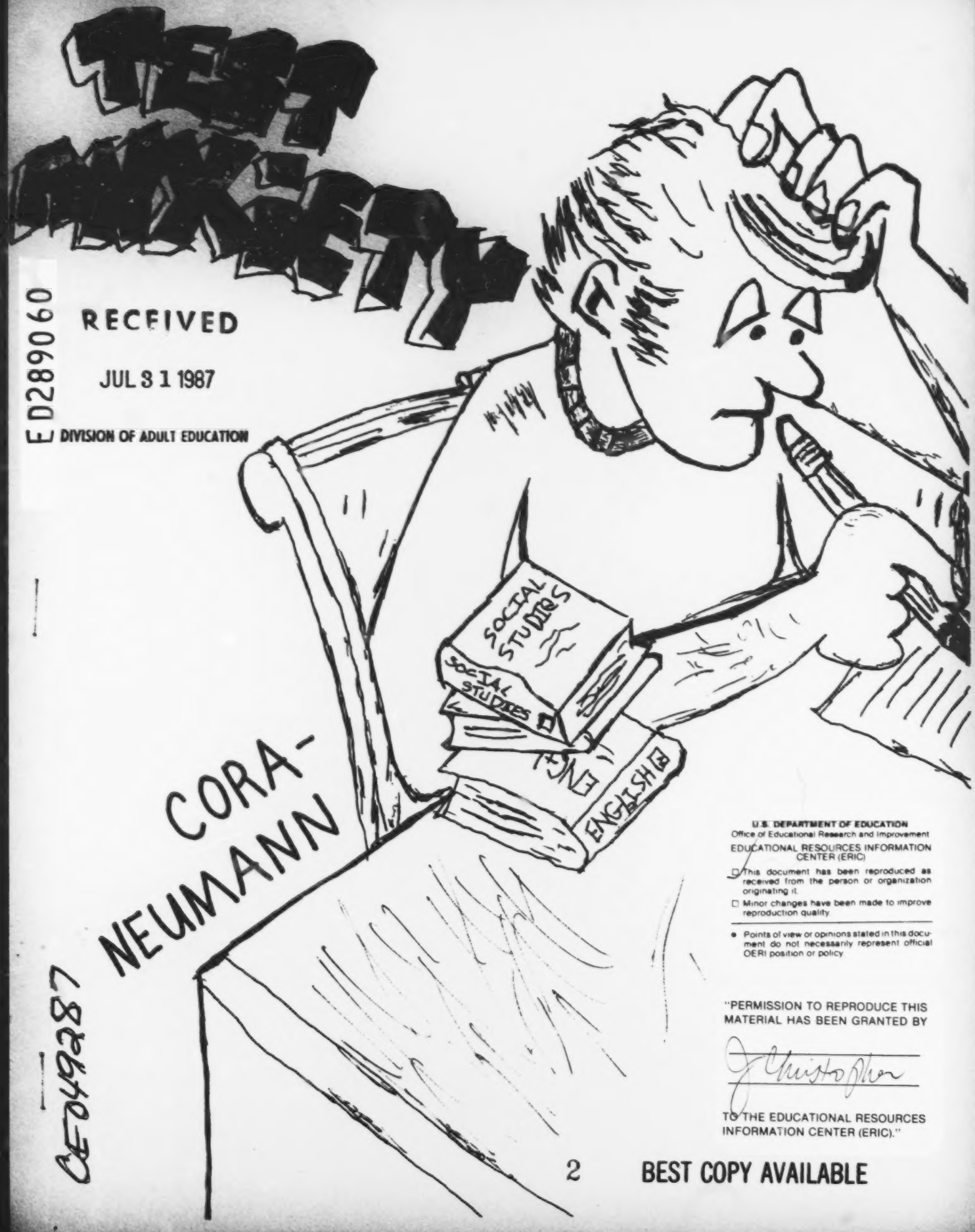

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TEST ANXIETY REDUCTION

Curriculum Guide

developed by

Eda Silverman, M.S., Program Assistant in Education
and Joyce Hanna, M.S.S., GED Teacher, from a
proposal written by Deborah Williams, M.Ed., Program Director,
under the supervision of Dr. Anthony Chunn, Executive Director.
The aforementioned are on the staff at
CORA-Neumann Program
Adams Avenue and Orthodox Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19124

This project was completed in May, 1987.

We would like to acknowledge the Pennsylvania Department of Education for providing $4,950 to fund this 310 project.

Pennsylvania Department of Education
Division of Advisory Services
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17126-0333

These materials have been submitted to Dr. John Christopher, Chief of the Division of Adult Basic Education at the Pennsylvania Department of Education. He will submit copies to AdvancE and that agency will be responsible for further dissemination.

AdvancE
The Adult Education Clearinghouse
PDE Resource Center
Pennsylvania Department of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17126-03333

Other copies have been sent to:

1. Gloria Ortiz
   Lutheran Settlement House
   1304 Frankford Avenue
   Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19125

2. Wayne Perry
   Project Director
   Focus
   700 Yarmall Street
   Chester, Pennsylvania 19013

3. Lucille Ott Howard
   Program Analyst
   Youth Services Coordinating Office
   City of Philadelphia
   Office of the Managing Director
   1401 Arch Street - 10th Floor
   Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102

This guide is a result of a project supported in whole or in part by the U.S. Office of Education and the Pennsylvania Department of Education. However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Office of Education or the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

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Copies of this guide and the student workbook can be obtained by contacting

AdvancE
The Adult Education Clearinghouse
PDE Resource Center
Pennsylvania Department of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17126-0333

Deborah Williams
Program Director
CORA-Neumann Program
Adams Avenue and Orthodox Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19124

Section One

ABSTRACT

Many students are plagued with test anxiety. The results these students obtain do not usually indicate their actual knowledge or how they might perform in a job situation. Yet, tests are used to determine class placement, grades for a class, job positions, job advancement, and military entrance. In light of this, it is of utmost importance that students learn how to control their test anxiety so they can perform at an acceptable level in order to achieve their goals.

This curriculum guide and the accompanying student workbook were designed to enable teachers to help students learn to cope with their test anxiety. The materials are appropriate for teenagers and adults.

Section Two

INTRODUCTION

As the day approached when Ann was to take the final examination in geography, she began to get very nervous. She began to eat poorly and she even started smoking again, a habit which she was seriously trying to break. The night before the exam, Ann's sleep was disturbed many times and she found herself tossing and turning and talking to herself. "I can't remember a thing I studied. Now, what is the average rainfall in northern China? I don't even know all the countries in Africa. I just know I'm going to fail this final. Then my friends will think I'm stupid and I won't be able to become a teacher. Then I won't be able to repay my loans because I won't have a job. Then the bill collectors will pound on my door and they'll probably throw me in prison. Oh, what am I going to do? My life is doomed. My life is over."

Ann is a test-anxious person whose anxieties make her prone to failure, and she is not alone. Many people are plagued with test anxiety. They are preoccupied with fears which "lead to errors in estimating the possibility of danger, loss (of love, job, money, reputation), and probability of attaining goals." (Sarason) Research has been done in both naturalistic settings and in laboratory experiments and the evidence "suggests that cognitive interference, often in the form of worry, is a key factor in lowering the performance of highly test-anxious people." (Sarason)

"Worries are distressing preoccupations and concerns about impending or anticipated events. Whereas depressed people tend to be

preoccupied with the past, the worries of those who are anxious tend to be future oriented.

Anxious people worry about their perceived personal incompetence and possible difficulties they may be called upon to confront. Their negative self-appraisals are unpleasant and, because they are self-preoccupying, they detract from task concentration. Since many anxious people describe themselves as being tense and feeling something terrible will happen, even though they cannot specify the cause of their worry, these self-preoccupations are likely to create cognitive interference that precludes an orderly, task oriented approach to situational requirements." (Sarason)

How do individuals develop test anxiety? It is the result of a combination of many factors, among which are repeated failures, negative messages an individual receives from significant others in his/her life, an individual's perception of him/herself, and an individual's evaluation of the test-taking experience. Erwin and Dinwiddie discuss at length the negative messages continually received from an individual's significant others and the impact this has on the individual's self-image. Having a poor self-image then leads an individual to attribute his/her successes to external factors ("It was an easy test.") and failures to internal factors ("I'm not good at solving problems.") "Unless specific steps are taken to interrupt this failure cycle, an individual has little chance of attaining the goals set for education and career. This last fact has an enormous amount of significance in the American society since tests are used throughout school to measure academic achievement, to channel students into particular class placements, to determine aptitude, and to

predict possible school success at higher levels of learning. Tests are also used at many places of employment to screen their applicants. Even the military has its entrance tests. Performance on a test may also mean the difference of whether or not an employee gets a job promotion and a higher salary. As Bernard Feder has said, "In the United States today, test-taking has become a major survival skill.

The ability to perform well on tests is not only an educational accomplishment, but a social and psychological one as well. The successful test-taker is praised by teachers and parents and esteemed by classmates. He or she builds a positive self-image and a foundation of confidence that help to shape the future. Conversely, failure to do well feeds upon itself. For young children, school and society are almost synonymous. Humiliation in the classroom follows the failure home and into the playground and the street. The social pressure of the classroom spills into the home and community." (Feder)

It has been shown that test performance has little correlation with what has actually been learned in a school course, or how an individual will perform on the job. Tests really measure only the ability to take tests.

"Most psychologists and educational leaders think that testing can be a useful and constructive way of measuring progress, diagnosing problems, and evaluating learning. But many test experts also agree that tests and test programs are often misused: many if not most tests used in schools and industry are inappropriate to the professed objectives of the school or business, and tests are being used far more frequently to sort out, screen, measure, classify, and assign people than to teach them or to help them." (Feder)

"For the test-taker, of course, it really doesn't matter who is responsible for the generally bad use of tests and test results. Increasing numbers of Americans are being marched off to school desks, reception rooms, auditoriums, army reception centers, hired halls, and tables in personnel offices to be folded, mutilated, and spindled by the testing process. As testing becomes a major national preoccupation, learning to cope with tests becomes a necessary social and economic skill." (Feder) This curriculum guide was created to help students learn how to perform well on tests so that they will be able to pursue their educational and career goals.

Overcoming test anxiety is no easy task, but it can be done with cognitive restructuring, reducing stored body tension, understanding the test, and systematic preparation. This curriculum guide will address these four issues. Cognitive restructuring involves an understanding of anxiety, formation of self-image from negative messages received, changing one's self-image, and the importance of mind control. Reducing stored body tensions takes place through a systematic program of general exercise and special relaxation exercises. Understanding the test includes knowledge of the type of test, scoring procedures, time allotments, location of the testing site, and possible transportation routes to the testing site. Systematic preparation means a regular routine for studying the subject matter that will be tested.

The following curriculum guide was designed to teach young adults in the late teenage years, but the lessons can be modified for any age-level student.

This project was developed by Eda Silverman, M.S., Program Assistant in Education and Joyce Hanna, M.S.S., GED Teacher, from a proposal written by Deborah Williams, M.Ed., Program Director, under the supervision of Dr. Anthony Chunn, Executive Director. The aforementioned are on the staff at CORA-Neumann Program, Adams Avenue and Orthodox Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19124.

Permanent copies of this curriculum guide and workbook will be filed at:

Pennsylvania Department of Education
Division of Advisory Services
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17126-0333

This project was completed between September 1986 and May 1987.

Section Three

NOTES TO INSTRUCTORS

1. This curriculum is designed to incorporate four two-hour classes and should be used in conjunction with the accompanying student workbook.

2. The curriculum developers suggest that instruction should take place with small groups of less than ten students.

3. Instructors should familiarize themselves with the suggested materials found in the bibliography in order to develop classroom techniques pertinent to each individual situation.

4. To facilitate the discussion of negative messages (Class II), the developers have found it helpful for instructors to disclose some of the shortcomings and negative messages they, themselves, have received.

5. Confidentiality is a requirement if students share information. Instructors should inform students of mutual respect and the importance of keeping disclosures confidential.

6. If instructors have access to videotaping equipment, they may find it helpful to make a videotape to provide students with a visual demonstration of test anxiety behaviors, test-taking strategies, and relaxation techniques. This videotape can be used in conjunction with other teaching methods.

Section Four

OUTLINE OF OBJECTIVES FOR EACH CLASS

Class I

A. Students will be able to identify 8 physical and 6 emotional behaviors associated with test anxiety.

B. Students will be able to write in their own words a general definition of anxiety which contains 3 of the 4 key concepts: physical and emotional response, individual perceptions, internal or external event, and a threatening situation.

C. Students will be able to describe and give an example of test anxiety as a conditioned fear.

D. Students will be able to present an example which demonstrates the difference between productive and unproductive anxiety.

E. Students will be able to identify 3 additional stressors experienced by minorities and 3 additional stressors experienced by women.

F. Students will be able to describe 3 general sources of test anxiety.

Class II

A. Given a checklist, students will be able to identify 10 of their own childhood messages that led to their test anxiety.

B. Students will be able to list 5 personal character traits regarding their own self-image.

C. Students will be able to talk about 1 personal example which shows the connection between their self-image, self and others' expectations, and their behavior.

D. Students will be able to list 3 examples of catastrophicizing.

E. Students will be able to describe 3 methods which can be used to reverse negative messages.

F. Students will be able to describe a method which can be used to counteract catastrophicizing.

Class III

A. Students will be able to list:

1) 5 pieces of information which they should obtain about the testing site and how to get there.

2) 4 pieces of information about the test, itself, and scoring procedures.

3) 3 methods of preparing themselves for the testing day.

B. Students will be able to complete a fill-in-the-blank form listing specific information about their individual testing situations.

C. Students will be able to identify 3 techniques for test-wise guessing and will be able to utilize these techniques on practice multiple-choice questions.

D. Students will be able to name:

1) 3 strategies for taking reading tests.

2) 5 strategies for taking math tests.

Class IV

A. Students will be able to list 3 benefits of regular exercise.

B. Students will be able to name 5 different methods of exercise.

C. Students will be able to define in their own words the importance of physical relaxation in reducing test anxiety.

D. Students will be able to name 3 different relaxation techniques they can do themselves.

E. Students will be able to name 3 other methods of stress reduction.

F. Students will be able to describe in their own words their experience with physical relaxation and systematic desensitization.

G. Students will be able to name 3 of the 4 methods of handling success.

H. Students will be able to name 5 specific techniques for handling personal test anxiety behaviors.

I. Students will be able to list 3 things they have learned about test anxiety.

Section Five

PROCEDURES FOR TEACHING EACH CLASS

Objectives and Goals	Procedures	Method of Validation
Class I		
Development of Objective A: Students will be able to identify 8 physical and 6 emotional behaviors associated with test anxiety.		A. Students will identify 8 physical and 6 emotional behaviors associated with test anxiety.
1. Create an anxiety-producing situation	1a. Instructors could administer a test (15 to 20 minutes in duration) with an explanation that it will determine their eligibility for continued enrollment in a program, advancement in a program, or any such fictitious pressure situation. (If this method is used, instructors should allow the students to vent their anger and frustrations at having been deceived.) -or- b. Instructors could ask students to recall a particularly anxiety-producing situation and to identify their physical and emotional response.	
2. Ask students to write about test-taking experiences.	2. Ask students to write a paragraph explaining their feelings about taking tests now (pg. 1 in student workbook).	
3. Discuss writings from Step 2.	3. Ask students to share their paragraphs.	
4. Make students cognizant of anxiety behaviors.	4a. Ask students to check off anxiety behaviors they are aware of in themselves (pg. 2 in student workbook). b. Discussion of both physical and emotional behaviors with feedback from instructors as to behaviors observed during test-taking situation in Step 1, if test was administered.	

Objectives and Goals	Procedures	Method of Validation
Development of Objective B: Students will be able to write in their own words a general definition of anxiety which contains 3 of the 4 key concepts: physical and emotional response, individual perception, internal or external event and a threatening situation.		B. Students will write their own definition of anxiety which includes 3 of the 4 key concepts: physical and emotional response, individual perception, internal or external event and a threatening situation
1. Define anxiety in general.	1a. Instructors should define anxiety and provide examples. Edwin and Dinwiddie, in their book, "Tests Without Trauma" (see bibliography), define anxiety as a physical and emotional response to an event, internal or external, that a person perceives as threatening. b. Instructors should note that anxiety is based on fear.	
Development of Objective C: Students will be able to describe and give an example of test anxiety as a conditioned fear.		C. Students will describe and give an example of test anxiety as a conditioned fear.
1. Discuss three different kinds of fears.	1. Instructors should name them and give examples: a. free-floating b. specific c. conditioned	
2. Discuss test anxiety as a conditioned fear.	2a. Students and instructors share personal experiences of test anxiety. b. Ask students to write a description of the first time they felt anxious during a test.	
Development of Objective D: Students will be able to present an example which demonstrates the difference between productive and unproductive anxiety.		D. Students will share with the group an example of how to turn unproductive test anxiety into productive anxiety.

Objectives and Goals	Procedures	Method of Validation
1. Make students aware of the conditions under which some anxiety is useful.	1. Discuss productive and unproductive anxiety. Productive anxiety leads to positive motivation or expending one's energy in the direction of something rewarding. Unproductive anxiety leads to negative motivation or expending one's energy to avoid something unpleasant.	
2. Help students understand that productive anxiety is necessary in test-taking situations.	2. Instructors should note: a. Concentration is enhanced. b. The mind is alert and focused. c. Reaction time is reduced.	
Development of Objective E:		
Students will be able to identify 3 additional stressors experienced by minorities and 3 additional stressors experienced by women.		E. Students will list 3 stressors experienced by minorities and 3 stressors experienced by women as they relate to text anxiety.
1. Discuss social and emotional impediments which may create a defeatist attitude for minorities and women as they attempt to overcome test anxiety.	1a. Instructors should emphasize additional stressors experienced by minorities. 1) negative stereotypes 2) language barriers 3) minority group discrimination in job positions 4) low expectations b. Additional stressors experienced by women. 1) fear of success as well as failure 2) low expectations 3) stereotypes of successful women being lonely and unable to find husbands and have families. 4) sex discrimination at the job site 5) minority women have additional race problems	
Development of Objective F:		
Students will be able to describe 3 general sources of test anxiety.		F. Students will describe 3 sources of test anxiety.

Objectives and Goals	Procedures	Method of Validation
1. Re-emphasize that test anxiety is a conditioned fear as a reason for learning control over one's fears.	1. Review the fact that test anxiety is a conditioned fear as explained in Class I.	
2. Discuss origins of test anxiety.	2a. Instructors should explain the fact that childhood messages affect people into adulthood. (Children believe parents are infallible.)	
	b. Instructors should emphasize the reality of the situation that people act on received messages and should avoid blame.	
Class II		
Development of Objective A:		
Given a check list, students will be able to identify 10 of their own childhood messages that led to their test anxiety.		A. Students will list 10 childhood messages that led to their test anxiety.
1. Review briefly the main ideas about the origins of text anxiety discussed in Class I		
2. Discuss examples of possible negative messages that were received in childhood from significant adults.	2a. Examples: 1) "You don't know as much as you think you do." 2) "You can do better than that - this is not good enough." 3) "You're stupid. You'll never make it in life."	
	b. Encourage students to share with the group some negative messages they received.	
	c. Instruct students to check off negative messages in student wordbook, Pgs. 3-4.	

Objectives and Goals	Procedures	Method of Validation
Development of Objective B: Students will be able to list 5 personal character traits regarding their own self-image.		
1. Discuss formation of self-concept as a result of negative messages.	1a. Instructors should point out that people identify with groups. 1) religious 2) ethnic 3) national b. Instructors should lead discussion of personal identity, "Who am I". 1) behavior 2) intelligence 3) competence 4) self-esteem 5) expectations c. Instruct students to write their identifications in student workbook Pg. 5.	B. Students will list 5 personal character traits regarding their own self-image.
Development of Objective C: Students will be able to talk about 1 personal example which shows the connection between their self-image, self and others' expectations, and their behavior.		C. Students will share with the group 1 personal example to demonstrate the connection between their self-image, self and others' expectations, and their behavior
1. Discuss behaviors which were developed in order to coincide with personal identify.	1a. Emphasize that people behave in accordance with self-expectations. b. Point out that behavior represents a survival strategy. 1) to behave differently threatens homeostatic balance. 2) self-sabotage is a way to maintain balance. c. Discuss positive and negative motivation. d. Point out that changing behavior required changing sense of identity.	

Objectives and Goals	Procedures	Method of Validation
Development of Objective D: **Students will be able to list 3 examples of catastrophicizing.** 1. Discuss concept of catastrophicizing	1a. Examples: 1) "If I don't do well on this test, everyone will think I am stupid." 2) "If I don't do well on this test, I can never be a doctor, and my life will be over." 3) "If I don't do well on this test, it will be the end of the world." b. Discuss how people make tests a life and death matter.	D. Students will list 3 examples of catastrophicizing.
Development of Objective E: **Students will be able to describe 3 methods which can be used to reverse negative messages.** 1. Discuss methods of reversing negative childhood messages.	1a. Re-examine childhood messages. Decide that significant adults are not always right. b. Identify childhood messages to be changed and write a counter-message. Message: "I am going to flunk this test." Counter-message: "I am well prepared. I have studied the material. I'm going to be clear-headed, and I'll do the best I can." c. Hold longer "dialogues-with-self" for deep negative messages. d. Use people you trust at the present time (peers, mentors) for positive feedback of their perceptions of you. If discrepancies exist between self-perception and trusted others' perceptions, believe the others.	E. Students will describe 3 methods to reverse negative messages.

Objectives and Goals:	Procedures	Method of Validation
Development of Objective F: Students will be able to describe a method which can be used to counteract catastrophicizing.	e. Decide to what degree revenge is a motive for continued failure. 1) Look at advantages of continuing to fail. 2) Decide that revenge is self-defeating. 3) Decide to use anger to promote success.	F. Students will describe a method which can be used to counteract catastrophicizing.
1. Discuss how to undo catastrophicizing.	1. Discuss realistic vs. unrealistic fears and methods for dealing with perceived catastrophes.	
Class III Development of Objective A: Students will be able to list 5 pieces of information which they should obtain about the testing site and how to get there; 4 pieces of information about the test, itself, and scoring procedure; 3 methods of preparing themselves for the testing day.		A. Students will list 5 pieces of information which they should obtain about the testing site and how to get there; 4 pieces of information about the test, itself, and scoring procedures; 3 methods of preparing themselves for the testing day.
1. Discuss specific information needed for the test.	1a. Through question and answer technique, elicit information from students about: 1) testing site 2) type of test 3) scoring procedures 4) how to prepare for the test b. Use check list in student workbook Pgs. 6-7.	

Objectives and Goals	Procedures	Method of Validation
Development of Objective B:		
Students will be able to complete a fill-in-the-blank form listing specific information about their individual testing situation.		B. Students will complete a fill-in-the-blank form listing specific information about their individual testing situations.
1. Instruct students to find out exact information about their particular testing site.	1. Help students fill out individual checklist in student workbook, Pg. 8	
Development of Objective C:		
Students will be able to identify 3 techniques for test-wise guessing and will be able to utilize these techniques on practice multiple-choice questions.		C. Students will share with the group 3 techniques for test-wise guessing and will utilize these techniques on practice multiple-choice questions.
1. Give instruction in techniques for test-wise guessing.	1a. Instruct students to answer questions in student workbook Pgs. 9-10. (Reading passages were deliberately eliminated.) b. Explain general strategies for taking multiple-choice tests as listed in student workbook Pg. 11. c. Instruct students to answer questions a second time using knowledge gained from strategies discussed. (Questions are repeated in student workbook, Pgs. 12-13.) d. Referring to Pg. 14 in the student workbook, review the correct answers to the questions, discussing reasons for eliminating certain choices.	
Development of Objective D:		
Students will be able to name 3 strategies for taking reading tests and 5 strategies for taking math tests.		D. Students will share with group 3 strategies for taking reading tests and 5 strategies for taking math tests.

Objectives and Goals	Procedures	Method of Validation
1. Give instruction in techniques for individual tests.	1. Using student workbook Pgs. 15-19, teach students the techniques for specific tests. a. Reading Comprehension Test b. Writing Skills Test c. Social Studies and Science Tests d. Math Test (Note: These strategies were developed for the GED test, but can be applied to other standardized tests as well.)	
Class IV		
Development of Objective A:		
Students will be able to list 3 benefits of regular exercise.		A. Students will list 3 benefits of regular exercise.
1. Discuss overall benefits of regular exercise.	1a. General health (Examples: lower blood pressurre, improved cardiovascular system. b. Stress reduction leads to healthy sleep patterns. c. Release of excess tension leads to increased ability to relax and to have a general feeling of well-being.	
Development of Objective B:		
Students will be able to name 5 different methods of exercise.		B. Students will list 5 different methods of exercise.
1. Discuss different methods of exercise.	1a. Encourage students to share their method of exercise b. Instructors will discuss other methods of exercise not mentioned. Refer to student workbook, Pg. 20.	

Objectives and Goals:	Procedures	Method of Validation
Development of Objective C:		
Students will be able to define in their own words the importance of physical relaxation in reducing test anxiety.		C. Students will share with the group the importance of physical relaxation in reducing test anxiety.
1. Discuss reason why physical relaxation is important for reducing test anxiety.	1a. Point out that fear produces tension which does not allow the body to function effectively. b. Emphasize the fact that body cannot be relaxed and tense at the same time. c. Point out that relaxation reduces anxiety so mind can think clearly.	
Development of Objective D:		
Students will be able to name different relaxation techniques they can do themselves.		D. Students will list 3 different relaxation techniques they can do themselves.
1. Instruct students in relaxation techniques.	1a. Instructors should emphasize the importance of breathing correctly. b. Teach self-massage of tense muscles. c. Techniques for relaxing entire body: tense muscles one at a time, working from feet to head--tense, hold, release.	
Development of Objective E:		
Students will be able to name 3 other methods of stress reduction.		E. Students will list 3 other methods of stress reduction.
1. Discuss other stress reduction methods.	1a. Instructors could mention other relaxation techniques: 1) Yoga 2) Transcendental Meditation 3) Biofeedback	

Objectives and Goals:	Procedures	Method of Validation
Development of Objective F: **Students will be able to describe in their own words their experience with physical relaxation and systematic desensitization.**		F. Students will share with the group their experience with physical relaxation and systematic desensitization.
1. Encourage students to participate in techniques discussed on Objective D.	1. Instructors lead students through relaxation techniques. a. Room lighting can be dimmed. b. Soothing, relaxation music can be played. c. Students will sit with both feet on the floor and their eyes closed.	
2. After physical relaxation has been induced, instructors will lead students through a visualization of the test-taking day as a means of a "systematic desensitization" developed by Joseph Wolpe and found in "Test Without Trauma". (See bibliography)	2a. Students will visualize themselves in a relaxed, clear-headed state in a test-taking situation. b. Instructors will give affirmations (positive suggestions) about students' success on the test-taking day. c. Students are reminded that, through mind control, the anxiety response can be replaced by a relaxation response. -Students will visualize themselves "blanking out." -Students will visualize themselves stopping the test, breathing deeply, massaging tense muscles, regaining control, and resuming the test thinking clearly. d. Students are slowly brought out of relaxed state by having them open their eyes and stretch their bodies.	
Development of Objective G: **Students will be able to name 3 of the 4 methods of handling success.**		G. Students will share with the group methods of handling success.

Objectives and Goals

1. Discuss how to handle success.

Development of Objective H:

Students will be able to name 5 specific techniques for handling personal test anxiety behaviors.

1. Help students identify their personal anxiety behaviors.
2. Help students to devise specific techniques for handling their personal anxiety behaviors.

Development of Objective I:

Students will be able to list 3 things they have learned about test anxiety.

1. Instruct students to evaluate test anxiety classes.

Procedures

1. Instructors should discuss possible pitfalls to success.
   a. threat to homeostatic balance
   b. conflicts with self-image
   c. awareness of possible future self-sabotage
   d. decision to succeed

1. Instructors will refer students back to Pg. 2 in student workbook.

2a. Instructors could give examples of how to handle specific physical and emotional responses.
   1) cognitive restructuring
   2) appropriate relaxation techniques
   3) counter-messages

b. Instruct students to write their plan for handling individual anxiety behaviors on Pg. 22 of the student workbook.

1. Instruct students to fill out evaluation sheet on Pg. 23 of the student workbook.

Method of Validation

H. Students will list 5 specific techniques for handling personal test anxiety behaviors.

I. Students will list 3 things they have learned about test anxiety

Section Six

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, there is no definite method to evaluate the results of student affective behavior. The most conclusive indication is from students' reporting their ability to relax and think more clearly in the testing situation. Another indication is the overall improvement of GED test scores of program participants.

Section Seven

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